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H41

ACTION EUR-00

RELEASED IN FULL

INFO LOG-00 AMAD-00 INL-00 DOTE-00 PDI-00 EB-00 FAAE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY VIENNA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1655
OSD WASHDC PRIORITY
WHITEHOUSE WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS VIENNA 003743

DEPT FOR EUR/AGS, INR/EU, AND EUR/PPD FOR LISBETH KEEFE

OSD FOR COMMANDER CHAFFEE

WHITEHOUSE FOR NSC/WEUROPE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: KPAO, AU, OPRC

SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: NOVEMBER 28, 2005

No Greens Crisis

1. Greens leader Alexander Van der Bellen, speaking on ORF TV's Sunday morning program "Meet the Press," has dismissed the alleged conflict between the grassroots representatives and the more mainstream proponents of his party. There was no quarrel, only a difference of opinions, Van der Bellen said, claiming that the Greens are in consensus on all major issues. He declined to discuss whether he preferred the OeVP or the SPÖ as potential coalition partners for the Greens.

Plassnik Committed to EU Enlargement

2. Ahead of the Austrian EU Presidency in 2006, Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik emphasized her support for further enlargement of the European Union. Speaking on ORF TV's Sunday night program "Offen gesagt," Plassnik said she would offer "active support" to candidates Bulgaria and Romania to meet all EU requirements. She underscored how Austria had

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profited from enlargement, adding she does "not understand the crisis talk." Plassnik also urged not to "dramatize" the current EU skepticism among Austrians.

Friends of Turkey?

3. asks independent political weekly "Profil" in its November 28 issue, reporting briefly on a survey by the Austrian Society for European Politics (OeGfE), which shows that eight percent of Austrians believe Turkey is already fit for EU membership. Another 28 percent support Turkish membership in ten years, and one in five Austrians thinks Turkey will be ready to join the EU in 20 years. Only one third of the interviewees do not believe Turkey will ever be fit for EU membership. According to "Profil," these results contradict the latest Eurobarometer survey on the matter, which says 80 percent of Austrians are opposed to Turkey becoming a member of the EU.

UN Representatives Investigate Hariri Case in Vienna

4. Sourcing Lebanese daily "Al Nahar," mass-circulation daily "Kurier" writes that UN investigators will question five Syrian intelligence agents at UN headquarters in Vienna Tuesday. There are indications the agents might have been involved in the plot to assassinate Lebanese Premier Rafik Hariri, killed in a car bomb attack in Beirut in February, the "Kurier" explains. Damascus has not identified the agents, so it is not yet known whether Syrian President Assad's brother-in-law Assef Shawkat is among them. There are reports that the head of the UN inquiry into the Hariri case, Detlev Mehlis, might also want to question Shawkat on the attack.

Swiss Vote against GMO Technology

5. All major Austrian media report that voters in Switzerland have approved a five-year ban on the use of genetically modified crops. A total of 55.7 percent of the electorate voted in favor of the moratorium. Supporters of the ban include farmers who believe the introduction of GMO crops would undermine organic produce. Mass-circulation tabloid "Kronen Zeitung" runs the front-page headline "Renewed attempt to ban GMO technology," arguing that the

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Swiss vote could boost GMO opponents in Austria. The tabloid quotes Minister for the Environment Josef Proell as promising he wants to use the Austrian EU Presidency to ask some critical questions about GMO technology.

----- CIA Overflights in National Security Council -----

6. headlines liberal daily "Der Standard" and writes the Austrian National Security Council will meet on Wednesday to look into potential "illegal CIA overflights" over Austrian territory. Aside from a well-documented overflight on

January 21, 2003, there have been at least 15 other suspicious flights through Austrian airspace by alleged CIA dummy companies, the daily says. Greens security spokesperson Peter Pilz believes it would be easy to obtain the data on the suspected overflights from Austro Controll, which records all flight data. However, at this point, Transport Minister Hubert Gorbach has not requested any data, the "Standard" says, and quotes Pilz as complaining "if Gorbach wanted to, he could get the data from Austro Controll. Then we could launch an inquiry." Gorbach, according to Pilz, "has direct access to the data, and yet he is doing nothing."

----- CIA Flights: USA Under Pressure -----

7. In a front-page report, centrist daily "Die Presse" cites mounting European pressure on the US government to disclose information regarding suspected stopovers of CIA-operated planes at European airports. Eight EU countries have so far demanded answers from Washington on the planes' destinations and passengers, the "Presse" says. The European Court of Justice and the Council of Europe have meanwhile launched investigations into the "mysterious" CIA flights, setting EU member states a three-month deadline for reports regarding their information on such flights and the alleged covert CIA prisons.

----- Saddam Hussein Trial Resumes -----

8. ORF radio early morning news "Morgenjournal" reports the trial of the deposed Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein and seven

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aides on murder and torture charges is set to resume in a Baghdad courtroom today. Prosecution witnesses are expected to take the stand for the first time. Security has been tightened after two defense lawyers were murdered and others, including witnesses received death threats. Meanwhile, according to front-page reports in mass-circulation daily "Kurier" and centrist daily "Die Presse," Iraq's former interim Premier Allawi has criticized the human rights situation in the country, warning that "human rights violations these days are as bad as under Saddam Hussein."

Van Voorst

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